



Sen. Jim Jeffords, I-Vt., takes a moment with his grandson, Patton Jeffords, on Capitol Hill on Wednesday before delivering a farewell speech on the Senate floor. Patton is held by his mother, Jeffords' daughter-in law, Maura.

DENNIS COOK, The Associated Press

## After 32 years, Jeffords bids farewell to Congress

By Ross Sneyd  
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WASHINGTON -- In the coming months, Jim Jeffords will walk onto the floor of the U.S. Senate many times before Congress adjourns for the year.

But he won't deliver another major speech.

He gave his last speech Wednesday, saying his farewell after 32 years in Congress.

With an aide at his side, his staffers on a bench behind him and his family looking on from the gallery, Jeffords, 72, delivered a typically homey speech, but also took his colleagues to task.

"We would be better served in world affairs today by being less haughty and more humble," Jeffords said, noting that when he entered the House in 1975, the Vietnam War was being fought. "I regret that my departure from Congress, like my arrival, finds our country at war. Young and not-so-young Americans are sacrificing life and limb, while the rest of us are making little or no sacrifice."

He chided Congress and the administration for failing to "pay today for the fiscal costs of our policies," and warned that children would spend decades paying bills incurred now.

"The basic compact between generations is being broken," Jeffords said.

Jeffords seldom sought the spotlight in his three decades in Washington, but he found it trained on him May 24, 2001, the day he bolted the Republican Party to become an independent, in the process delivering the Senate majority to Democrats.

Most of Wednesday's speech was a reflection on his accomplishments, especially in environmental policy and on education, particularly for disabled children. He made no mention of his 2001 defection from the GOP, but Republican senators still did not want to hear his message.

Sen. Lincoln Chafee of Rhode Island and Sen. Charles Grassley of Iowa -- the latter who entered the House in 1975 along with Jeffords -- were the only Republicans who sat through the speech, rising with Democrats to applaud after Jeffords spoke.

Although he won't formally retire until a new Congress is seated early next year, the House and Senate will wrap up their business this week and will return after the elections only to finish some incomplete work.

That lame-duck session is expected to be quick and businesslike, so this was Jeffords' swan song.

As he spoke, his wife, Liz, daughter Laura, son Leonard Jeffords and daughter-in-law, Maura, and grandson Patton sat in the senators' gallery with his staff, who closed his Senate office for 90 minutes in deference to the ceremony on the Senate floor.

A longtime Civil War history buff, Jeffords noted the role in that conflict played by Vermont regiments and said legend has it that a congressman from the north "waved a bloody shirt before his colleagues to inflame them against the South for alleged misdeeds. ... Waving the bloody shirt, then or today, is anything but patriotic."

He mentioned his dedication to education, people with disabilities and the environment, but it was his colleagues who offered up the anecdotes, describing him as humble, quiet and unlikely to trumpet his own accomplishments.

Sen. Edward Kennedy, D-Mass., who has served alongside Jeffords on the health and education committee, spoke of a program Jeffords established that sent adults to elementary school classes to read books with students.

"Jim Jeffords led a number of us from the Capitol to (a Washington school) to read with second-graders," Kennedy said. "It was just a simple illustration that he doesn't just talk the talk, he walks the walk."

Grassley lauded the "moderation" that Jeffords inspired in his colleagues, "whether as a Republican or an independent."

It was Democrats who rallied around Jeffords for breaking with the Republican Party after President Bush and the GOP majority refused to move toward fully funding special education, backing tax breaks instead.

"I will never, ever remember anything more vividly than the senator from Vermont, as a matter of courage and principle, change course and the course of the country," said Senate Minority Leader Harry Reid, D-Nev.

Sen. Patrick Leahy, D-Vt., said he was wishing Jeffords well on behalf of the entire state.

"We both have that sense of Vermont. He has never lost it," Leahy said. "I applaud him for the state."